

## **Chapter Two**

### **The Americanization of Adam**

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No other religious movement has done more to sacralize America than Mormonism. For them, the United States is, in a sense unparalleled in popular thinking, 'the promised land'. Its scriptures make this an article of faith. The Book of Mormon first published in the early 19th Century has a Sixth-century B.C. prophet fleeing from Jerusalem called Nephi, receiving a revelation from the Lord: "...inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments, ye shall prosper, and shall be led to a land of promise; yea, even a land which I have prepared for you; yea, a land which is *choice above all other lands*."<sup>1</sup>

#### **America in the Book of Mormon**

Some 900 years before Columbus stepped ashore on an island in the Gulf of Mexico, baptizing it San Salvador and claiming it for the King and Queen of Spain, Nephi and his family "did arrive at the promised land; and ... went forth upon the land, and did pitch our tents."<sup>2</sup> While Columbus to his dying day remained ignorant of the true identity of his discovery, extant charts and log books confirm the reality of that discovery. He had opened up the way to the New World. On the other hand, no evidence archaeological or otherwise, exists to confirm the Semitic civilization which descended from Nephi,<sup>3</sup> though this particular claim for America remains a cardinal tenet of the Mormon faith.

Prior to the coming of the Nephites was another migratory group of Hebrews (?) fleeing from the Middle East between 3,000 - 2,000 B.C. This group, the Jaredites, were one of the peoples who were scattered at the time when the Lord

confounded language at the Tower of Babel. Their history fills fifteen chapters of only one book of the Book of Mormon, the book of Ether. Jared speaking with his brother, muses about a new home for the people, "And who knoweth but the Lord will carry us forth into a land which is choice above all the earth."<sup>4</sup> Again the land of promise is America. Here they are promised they will become a great nation, "and there shall be none greater than the nation which I will raise up unto me of thy seed, upon all the face of the earth."<sup>5</sup>

The implications of this account are obvious. Centuries before the Lord told Abram to leave his country, and promised to make him "into a great nation" and gave him "this land to take possession of it",<sup>6</sup> Jared is offered the land of America. This means that America takes precedence over Israel in Mormon sacred history. It also helps us to understand how Mormonism can make such extraordinary claims for America's future.

In a revelation given through Joseph Smith the Prophet on July 20th, 1831, the Lord proclaimed that "the land of Missouri is the land which I have appointed and consecrated for the gathering of the saints. Wherefore this is the land of promise, and the place for the city of Zion."<sup>7</sup> It is a long haul from Babel to 19th Century frontier America, but the claim remains the same, the only change being the delineation of a particular part of America. Previously in New York, less than a year after the Mormon Church had been founded, the Lord told Joseph that he sought to give him greater riches "even a land of promise, a land flowing with milk and honey." The Lord covenants with the prophet in Abrahamic terms promising the land "for the inheritance of your children forever, while the earth shall stand." As if to outdo Abraham's inheritance "the great I AM" adds, "and ye shall possess it again in eternity, no more to pass away."<sup>8</sup>

Unlike many 19th Century millenarians who speculated about the time of the Second Advent and the inauguration of the new age, Joseph Smith appointed a place instead. It has always been a fundamental principle of Mormonism - the Church of Jesus Christ of *latter-day* Saints - that it exists to establish the cause of Zion. This means, in the prophet's words, that a people must be "perfected and prepared to meet the Lord Jesus Christ when he shall appear in great glory."<sup>9</sup> The prophet's own scriptures, the Book of Mormon, and the writings of Enoch in the Book of Moses, speak of the "momentous obligation and responsibility of building the New Jerusalem in the Dispensation of the Fulness of Times."<sup>10</sup> To

accomplish this Herculean task Joseph Smith did two things. First he presented to the world an American-based history of Antiquity, in the Book of Mormon. Secondly, through him Zion was to be established in the last days for the salvation of humanity. It was to be the beginning of the end of God's dealings with the race, the climax of salvation history. Supremely confident in the destiny that awaited his people, the prophet issued his challenge to the 19th Century:

I calculate to be one of the instruments for setting up the kingdom of Daniel by the word of the Lord, and I intend to lay a foundation that will revolutionize the world. It will not be by sword or gun that this kingdom will roll on: the power of truth is such that all nations will be under the necessity of obeying the Gospel.<sup>11</sup>

The Kingdom of Daniel was to commence in the Republic of Washington. Columbia, "the gem of the Ocean", had been foreseen in the Book of Mormon. In 1 Nephi chapter 13, the young son of Lehi receives a vision in which he sees the nations of the gentiles. He sees a man inspired by the Spirit of God "to go forth upon the many waters" (Columbus), "unto the seed of my brethren, who were in the promised land" (Nephi's expatriate Jews who had migrated to the Americas in the 6th Century B.C.). Nephi, peering into a future over twenty centuries removed from his own, sees "other Gentiles" who "went forth out of captivity, upon the many waters" (pilgrim fathers and other early settlers in America). He foretells the wars between the whites and the Indians, as well as the American War of Independence - "And I beheld their mother Gentiles (the British) were gathered together upon the waters, and upon the land also, to battle against them." Neither British mismanagement of the war nor American battle tactics were responsible for the American victory, "the power of God was with them (the Americans) and ... the wrath of God was upon all those that were gathered together against them to battle" (the British).<sup>12</sup> America's destiny under divine protection is that she is to be the land upon which the Kingdom will be established. God's power will lift her up "above all other nations" for God has covenanted with Nephi's father that his seed (the Jews who landed in America in 600 B.C.) "should have (America) for the land of their inheritance."<sup>13</sup>

The Book of Mormon gives America a wondrous antiquity in which Jaredites, Nephites and Lamanites rather than Olmecs, Mayans, Aztecs or Incas

emerge as the really significant civilizations. The setting and history of the Book of Mormon are as equally impressive as the Bible, and America itself effectively becomes the "Old" World. Peter Meinhold sees in the Book of Mormon the "expression of an American quest for a usable past which represents a native American historical consciousness unrivalled to this degree and intensity in the entire range of American historical thought."<sup>14</sup> When one considers the scope of the Book of Mormon's historical content and the races involved in its accounts, it becomes obvious that Meinhold's assessment is a most perceptive one. Again it must be stressed that no understanding of Mormonism's future expectations for America is possible without appreciating what it made of America's past. If wondrous things are yet to occur on the American continent it is only because the Lord has already wrought mighty miracles through the ancient inhabitants of that land.

The Book of Mormon claims to be the equivalent of the Old and New Testaments. It covers a period of twenty-five centuries though the bulk of the book is dated from 600 B.C. to 421 A.D. The history's location is presumed to be central and south America. The record contains fifteen books written by ancient Hebrew-American prophets and kings. In the current edition (1982) the contents run to 531 pages. The original records were engraved on metal plates fashioned from a gold-copper alloy and discovered buried in a hill in New York State in 1824. The unknown language of the plates is described in the record itself as "reformed Egyptian."<sup>15</sup> When the book was first published in 1830, it gave its advocates the nickname "Mormon" since he was one of the chief figures who wrote the original.

Reference has already been made to the major migratory groups who came to America from the Middle East as early as 2,000 B.C. The first group, those that fled from the confusion of the Tower of Babel were the Jaredites. They took with them animals, birds, fresh-water fish and seeds for all types of domestic crops. After four years of preparations in the wilderness of the "valley of Nimrod" (?) they built eight barges to carry them on their epic voyage half way around the world.

The Jaredite migration was successful and a great civilization was established in Ancient America. It lasted for almost two millennia, destroying itself through internal conflict and brutal warfare *ca.* 600 B.C. The Lord had promised that the

Jaredite civilization would be greater than any other, and is alleged to have been contemporaneous with those of Babylon, China, Egypt and Assyria (even though there is no evidence of its existence outside the Book of Ether). To understand how Zion will incorporate more than just the inhabitants of the American continent we need to consider the second migratory group who succeeded the Jaredites.

This group journeyed to the Americas in the 6th Century B.C. during the first year of the reign of Zedekiah, King of Judah. Judah was facing conquest by the Babylonians. Jeremiah was preaching that captivity by Babylonia was inevitable and unavoidable (Jeremiah 21:3-10), and that no alliance would save Zedekiah from his fate. The Bible speaks of those events as a time of God's judgement. God was using Nebuchadnezzar as his instrument of judgment on an unfaithful people. Two options were given the inhabitants of Judah. They could stay in Jerusalem and die by the sword, famine or plague, or they could go out and surrender to the Babylonians and escape with their lives. No third option is mentioned. Despite the gloom, Jeremiah prophesied that a remnant would be saved and would later return from captivity to rebuild the shattered kingdom. In this way the promises of God would be fulfilled., and despite the unfaithfulness of his people he would "bring them back to this land: (Jer. 24:6). It is precisely at this point that the Book of Mormon account diverges.

A prophet named Lehi, father of Nephi, said to be a contemporary of Jeremiah, is told that there is a third option. The righteous within Jerusalem are to escape captivity and death altogether, journey into the wilderness, build a boat, and be led across the waters to America! God will be their "light in the wilderness", lead them towards "the promised land", "deliver you from destruction."<sup>16</sup> In what sense America is the promised land for the children of Abraham is never explained. While God says to Jeremiah that the Babylonian scourge is his inescapable judgement on his people, he says to Lehi and Nephi that they are to be delivered from that same judgement. The Bible speaks of only one promised land - that promised to Abraham. The Book of Mormon changes this promise and has God leading a righteous remnant to another promised land Abraham never conceived of - America.

This group of Hebrews consisting of Lehi, his wife Sariah and their sons Laman, Lemuel, Sam and Nephi, as well as the families of Zoram and Ishmael,

fled Jerusalem into the Sinai wilderness.

On the shores of the Arabian Sea, the little colony built and provisioned a boat and set sail across the waters. Mormons believe their voyage carried them eastwards over the Indian Ocean, then right over the Pacific to the western coast of America, where they landed about 590 B.C. In this land of promise they quickly established themselves and in the course of a few generations their numerous posterity had taken possession of the land. Before Lehi died, he made a prophecy in which he identified a choice prophet and seer whom the Lord would raise up in the last days. He would be a descendant of Lehi, who was of the tribe of Manasseh, and would be great like Moses. His mission would be to bring forth God's word to future generations. The future prophet and deliverer is to be named Joseph, and this, according to Mormons, is a wonderful prophecy about the Prophet Joseph Smith. Following Lehi's death a division occurred among the Nephite people. Some followed Nephi, and others Laman, Lehi's eldest son. These divided peoples became known as the Nephites and Lamanites. The two groups increasingly opposed one another, and the more wicked Lamanite faction was cursed by God. The mark of the curse was a darker skin to distinguish them from their brethren and discourage intermarriage. Thousands of people who were before "exceedingly fair and delightsome" became dark and loathsome, their skin of "blackness" designed to make them less "enticing unto my people".<sup>17</sup>

Of all the peoples mentioned in the Book of Mormon, only the descendants of the Lamanites allegedly exist today.

The Lamanites while increasing in numbers, fell under the curse of divine displeasure; they became dark in skin and benighted in spirit, forgot the God of their fathers, lived a wild nomadic life, and degenerated into the fallen state in which the American Indians - their lineal descendants - were found by those who rediscovered the western continent in later times.<sup>18</sup>

In the course of the Book of Mormon's history we discover that the few Lamanites who united with the Nephites were numbered among the Nephites, and "their curse was taken from them, and their skin became white like unto the Nephites."<sup>19</sup> Such incidents merely preview an even greater and more universal

blessing of the Lamanites which the Book of Mormon predicts will occur in the last days. It envisaged a time when the Gospel (Mormon) would be preached to their descendants "and their scales of darkness shall begin to fall from their eyes; and many generations shall not pass away among them, save they shall be a white and delightsome people."<sup>20</sup> From the very beginning of its history, the Mormon Church has always had a special burden for the American Indian. It approached them with the announcement that they were the remnant of a once mighty people who had once inhabited the Americas and that God meant to make them great again. The Church informed them that the history of their real forefathers was to be found in the Book of Mormon.

The Mormons are the only group in the United States who have a theological view of the Indians, i.e., they are not merely interested in their conversion but in their contribution to the sacred history of America. In January 1833 Joseph Smith said the Book of Mormon identified "our western tribes of Indians" as ... "descendants from that Joseph which was sold into Egypt." His words spoken over a skeleton unearthed in Illinois in 1834 indicate that the final great battles of the Book of Mormon history took place in that region of the United States. John Taylor, one of Joseph Smith's successors spoke of missionary work of the Indians being an urgent task "if we desire to retain the approval of God." Perhaps the greatest advocate of Indian missions and Indian rights was the late President Spencer W. Kimball (1895-1985), 12th President Prophet of the Mormon Church.<sup>21</sup> The Book of Mormon speaks of a day when the curse on the Lamanite will be lifted and they will realize again, their heritage and destiny - their true identity as children of Israel. This eschatological event is called "the Day of the Lamanite" and President Kimball believed it had begun in his lifetime, "the day of the Lamanite is surely here and we are God's instrument in helping to bring to pass the prophecies" of the Book of Mormon.<sup>22</sup> We shall consider later what those prophecies entail. The Lamanite is Mormonism's only tangible link with its sacred American past. In the absence of any archaeological evidence they are a living relic, one which motivates hope for future events which are yet to transpire on the American continent.

Mormon scholars have for years been down-playing exaggerated claims for Book of Mormon archaeological 'evidences'. Mormon apologist Blake Ostler recently attempted a defence of the Book of Mormon by suggesting that it may

be an expansion of an ancient work. Joseph Smith, he suggests "built on the work of earlier prophets to answer the nagging problems of his day". Ostler believes that the Prophet provided "unrestricted and authoritative commentary, interpretation, explanation and clarifications based on insights from the ancient Book of Mormon text and the King James Bible. The result is a modern world view and theological understanding superimposed on the Book of Mormon text". Later he cites John L. Sorenson, leading Mormon archaeologist and scholar as admitting that "despite vigorous debate no concrete evidence exists establishing a Book of Mormon archaeology". Ostler believes, like most Mormons that something akin to the Ebla discovery may yet turn up. For the moment then, Mormons can still go on believing that the Book is a factual account of America's past, and therefore a true indicator of its future, while living in the hope that their faith will be verified at some later date.<sup>23</sup>

The most significant event to occur in the Book of Mormon is the appearance of Christ in the Western hemisphere following his resurrection in Judaea. He allegedly appeared to the Nephites, preached the gospel, established his church - which survived for about two hundred years - and promised to return one day to that continent. Mormons find in legendary sources of the Incas and Mayas support for their belief that a great white bearded God visited ancient America. Whether the legends speak of Quetzalcoatl of the Nahua, Virakocha of the Peruvians or Kukulcan, the Mormons believe the true identity of the fabled figures is Jesus Christ. "The short ministry of Christ in America had such lasting effects that 1900 years later his visit can be recognized by the legends and other knowledge available."<sup>24</sup> Although a major problem arises that such legendary culture-heroes are not at all contemporary with the historical periods in the Book of Mormon - the Toltec god Quetzalcoatl (the Plumed Serpent), for instance, emerging too late in time to be considered a candidate for Jesus Christ<sup>25</sup> - nevertheless as a further means of sanctifying America, the Book of Mormon's account of Christ's visit is significant.

Some years after the Book of Mormon was published as a record of God's dealings with the ancient inhabitants of the Americas<sup>26</sup> Joseph Smith came into possession of some ancient Egyptian papyri which he claimed to translate by the inspiration and power of God.<sup>27</sup> The translation took the form of two books of sacred scripture, one being the Book of Abraham and the other, the Book of



Moses. It is the latter, containing the original and expanded text of Genesis which bestows upon America the ultimate glorification. Mormon hopes for the future are partly based on the revelations about the American past which this text contains. In the Book of Genesis we are told that Enoch, the seventh from Adam, “walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him away” (Gen. 5:24). Whatever became of Enoch we do not know, other than that “God took him.” Where the Old Testament is silent, the Book of Moses has much to say. It offers two descriptive chapters on the life of Enoch (chapters 6 and 7 of the Book of Moses). Through “modern revelation” Joseph Smith announced that the entire pre-diluvian civilization of Genesis had actually been sited in ancient America. The modern revelation became the basis of Mormon hopes for the latter-day establishment of Zion on the American continent, but that hope itself was firmly based on America’s amplified and epic past.

Enoch in Joseph’s Book of Moses received a superior revelation of the Earth’s history, including the coming of Christ and his redemption. Enoch preached the gospel to many nations and called the people to repentance. When the enemies of God came against him and his people, Enoch “spake the word of the Lord, and the earth trembled and the mountains fled ... and the rivers of water were turned out of their course ... so powerful was the word of Enoch.”<sup>28</sup> Despite this display and the subsequent rising out of the sea of a new land, the wicked did not repent. Enoch then built a city called “The City of Holiness, even Zion” where all the righteous seed of Adam took up residence. In time the entire populace became so righteous that God decided to bless the people in a special way. Bettering the Genesis account, where it is recorded that Enoch alone was taken away by God, the Book of Moses has the whole city of Enoch taken away!

And Enoch and all his people walked with God, and he dwelt in the midst of Zion; and it came to pass that Zion was not, for God received it up into his own bosom; and from thence went forth the saying, Zion is fled.<sup>29</sup>

The whole city, including houses, farms, fields, cattle and people, was “translated” and removed from the surface of the planet earth. In a Mormon commentary on the subject we read the following:

In 2,948 B.C. when Enoch was 430 years old, he and the population of the entire city of Zion were translated and removed from the earth to another planet. This quickening process was a remarkable physical metamorphosis whereby the seeds of death were neutralized within them and their bodies became subject to a higher system of physical laws ... As President Brigham Young commented: 'He (Enoch) obtained power to translate himself and his people with the region they inhabited.'<sup>30</sup>

Smith once explained that the power of translation is a power which belongs to the priesthood, but that it has "been kept hid from before the foundation of the world ... to be revealed in the last times."<sup>31</sup> By exercising this very priesthood power Enoch was able to transform himself, his people and their city so that it could withstand the shattering experience of being lifted from the surface of the earth, and whisked through interplanetary space. This extraordinary event in the Earth's history is said to have occurred about the time when the Sumerian civilization was rising to greatness in the lower Tigris-Euphrates Valley, and during the period of the first two dynasties (3,200 - 2,700 B.C.) of ancient Egypt. Enoch and his people became messengers of God or ministering angels to populations of other planets - "Terrestrial Bodies".<sup>32</sup>

At the last day or near the end of the present age, the "translated" portion of earth, with Enoch's people on it, will come through inter-stellar space again, enter Earth's orbit, and descend to where it was before. (Some popular Mormon speculations identify the locale for the Enochian civilization as having been in the Gulf of Mexico, which will be filled up again at the End). The lost Ten Tribes of Israel, too, will again return from their hidden place in the "northern regions" to join with the city of Zion. Mormon eschatology, of which we will say more in the next section of this study, clearly identifies the events which will precede Christ's second coming. The return of these two ancient groups is an essential and integral part of the establishment of Zion and the building of the New Jerusalem. It is an expression of what we shall suggest is the Mormon 'Cargo Cult', and Mormon eschatology is very descriptive of the preparations which must be made before that Cargo can be received.

Mormons suggest that the tribes are still on Earth, but scattered throughout various regions. They believe that when Joseph Smith spoke about the tribes

coming forth at the last day from the "north countries" that he meant northern Europe or Asia. The church still holds to the view that the location of the lost tribes is still the Lord's secret, and that anyone claiming to identify their location is speaking without authority. Only the North Polar regions theory, that they are secluded behind or under the icebergs of the polar regions, is thought to be supported by Mormon scriptures which suggest that before the tribes can come forth in the last days, they must "smite the rocks, and the ice shall flow down at their presence."<sup>33</sup>

Further on the subject of the whereabouts of the tribes, James E. Talmage, a past Mormon apostle and theologian has written:

From the scriptural passages already considered, it is plain that, while many of those belonging to the Ten Tribes were diffused among the nations, a sufficient number to justify the retention of the original name were led away as a body and are now in existence in some place where the Lord has hidden them ... their return constitutes a very important part of the gathering, characteristic of the dispensation of the fulness of times.<sup>34</sup>

Previously we noted that Smith saw his primary task as preparing and perfecting a people who would be fit to meet the Lord when he shall return and reign from his American Zion. We noted that he went about this challenge by first presenting the world with a radically new version of American antiquity. This version gave validity and sanctity to the American continent as a promised land. The validity is based on the sacred nature of latter-day scriptures such as the Book of Mormon and the Book of Moses. It is now time to consider the Prophet's other means of furthering his epochal mission.

Joseph Smith taught that the Book of Mormon "was the most correct book on earth, and the keystone of our religion".<sup>35</sup> In the light of what the book did for America's past, this statement is readily understood. Everything that Mormons yet hope for in America is based on the 'reality' of what God has already accomplished on that continent. In this respect Mormonism links up with Judaism and Christianity as a religion whose basic premises are fundamentally established on the foundation of historic, saving events. In this, Mormonism is probably more akin to the Jewish concept of the Holy Commonwealth than to the Christian con-

cept of the apocalyptic kingdom. That is, Mormonism equates the New Age with a realized eschatology which focuses on a particular continent and a chosen people living under prophetic circumstances. The Old Testament elements are all there - the land, the people, the holy city and the temple. The major distinction, of course, is that the Mormon Zion is even more universalist than the Jewish. The American New Jerusalem embraces a chosen people who include Gentiles, American Indians and Polynesians. It is also not exclusivist in the sense that it views world rule in the Messianic age as radiating from two capitals - the Jewish Jerusalem and the Missouri Zion. In contrast to more typical Christian millenarism, it is more distinctly political and materialistic as a 'Zionism'.

The Mormon blueprint for America's future is supplemented by the Prophet's personal revelations. Most of these are bound within the covers of the Doctrine and Covenants, while others are recorded in diaries, journals and histories of the church. Smith's own articles of faith - thirteen in number - express the Mormon view of revelation. "We believe all that God has revealed, all that he does now reveal, and we believe that he will reveal many great and important things pertaining to the Kingdom of God." This explanation of the dynamic nature of Mormon truth, renders inspired all the utterances of the founding Prophet and his successors. The Tenth Article of Faith utters a basic truth and hope to which all those successors have subscribed:

We believe in the literal gathering of Israel and in the restoration of the Ten Tribes; that Zion (the New Jerusalem) will be built upon the American continent; that Christ will reign personally upon the earth; and, that the earth will be renewed and receive its paradisiacal glory.<sup>36</sup>

How was this hope of the "gathering" expressed in early Mormon history and what does it entail?

### **Early Zionism and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints**

The Mormons were not alone in their views of the "gathering" and the eschatology of the latter days. Nor were they alone in their views of America. What